

**96-97 FINAL REPORT  
ALA/USIA LIBRARY FELLOW TO ETHIOPIA**

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*Abstract: The National Library of Ethiopia (NLE) in Addis Ababa requested a librarian to help with staff training, evaluate organizational procedures and processes, and make recommendations to the institution. In order to work on the objectives, Library seminar/discussions were held on various topics for both professionals and support staff. A newly formed task force set out to write a mission statement with clear goals and objectives, worked on revising the 21 year old library guidebook for users, and started on completing the NLE's card catalog. Ultimately, the end results of these projects would be useful in getting aid from the government of Ethiopia as well as outside constituents. In addition to starting some ongoing projects, the NLE staff and I took part in many dialogs on library practices and concepts. We both hope that the NLE will benefit and grow by the Library Fellowship partnership.*

The Project: The National Library of Ethiopia was organized 52 years ago first as a public library for the country. In the 1970s it was then designated as the National Library by Emperor Haile Selassie. The NLE offices of today were constructed by the Italians and were utilized as a medical facility in the 1940s when they occupied Ethiopia for a brief time period. Today, the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia (NALE) consists of a few buildings in a pleasant compound off the busy Churchill Street and across from the Black Lion Hospital in Addis Ababa. Other buildings and offices in the compound are occupied by the Ministry of Information and Culture under which the NLE is governed.

The NALE is administered by a Manager and under which is the Head of the Library and the Head of Archives. In January, the Head of the Library was Waizero Hirut Getachew. Ato Ahmed Adem was the Head of Archives and the Head of the Library was and still is Waizero Almaz Mengistu. Some weeks after my arrival, Waizero Hirut resigned and Ato Ahmed was then named Acting Manager of NALE. The Minister of Information and Culture is Ato Woldemichael Chemu.

The NLE asked for assistance in training the staff in acquisitions, cataloging, reader services and management. The organization said they wanted to rise up to the standards of other libraries worldwide. It was apparent that the NLE required a lot more space, had an insufficient number of books and resources (absence of computers) and needed more trained library professionals who could fully utilize their newly acquired technical and specialized skills.

The collections at the NLE were mostly older materials, well used, and quite out of date. When the Derg regime took over after Emperor Haile Selassie, there was a problem with foreign currency during the 1970s and 80s. As a result, the biggest part of the collection tends to be books that were published prior to the 1960s. There is a huge need for the NLE to get newer titles in the humanities, social sciences and sciences. On most days,

there is a long queue of potential library users (about a block long) waiting to get a space within the NLE.

The treasure of the NLE is the Ethiopian Studies collection which contains many rare books and special editions with hand colored plates and bindings. A large number of researchers, especially from abroad, are likely to use this part of the NLE more than any other part. The manuscripts section is part of Ethiopian studies and has many exquisitely hand made colorful and illuminated animal skin items.

Since the NLE has a small budget, it depends a great deal on gifts and donations for acquiring library materials. However, there does not seem to be an ongoing systematic way of tapping into funding sources and getting aid from NGOs, embassies, and private donors. New and used books come from many places, but not enough materials come on a routine basis to serve the informational needs of the NLE users.

The lack of space is a growing and big concern of the NLE staff. Blueprints were drawn up some years ago when it looked like a major donor would assist with a new library facility. Due to lack of a major funding sponsor and a change in the political situation reasons this plan did not materialize. The NLE administrators are looking forward to a new building to house its growing collection in the near future. There is also a lack of any automation at the NLE with only one electric typewriter in the manager's office. Newer equipment such as modern telephones, typewriters, a fax machine, photocopiers, computers, and library technical processing machines are urgently needed for the NLE to come up to the standards of other libraries.

Many of the library professionals were trained abroad. At the time of the Derg regime (previous government), three staff members studied in the Soviet Union and in East Germany. Several others received diplomas (equivalent to an associate degree in the US) from Addis Ababa University. Two librarians recently returned with their Master's degrees from India. Many indicated that even though they had received good training they could not apply what they had learned due to lack of resources and automated systems at the NLE.

The Head of the Library has four teams reporting to her. The teams are Acquisitions and Cataloging, Legal Deposits, Ethiopian Studies, and Reference. They each are represented by a team leader. The team leaders and their staff all provided help to me in gathering information about the organizational structure and procedures.

Acquisitions and Cataloging is situated in an incredibly small space which used to have a leak in the ceiling. Books are placed on insufficient shelving and then piled on the floor in tall precarious stacks. Ato Tilahun and his staff need more work space and shelves to keep up with the volume of materials they receive in order to do an adequate job. New typewriters or computers to expedite cataloging would make this a more efficient operation. The Dewey Classification scheme is used throughout the NLE. Ato Beshir was the Acting Head of this section.

Waizerit Kibinish heads the Legal Deposit collection which is contained in three rooms. The NLE attempts to collect three copies of each title printed in Ethiopia according to Proclamation 50-68. They collect printed books, musical cassettes, magazines, newspapers and videos as well.

Legal Deposits creates a *National Bibliography and Periodical Index* which could be simplified if there was a computer to create these documents.

Once again, materials are stacked way high up on the shelves and are even double stacked side by side on one shelf due to lack of space. Even though audiovisual materials are collected, currently, there is no equipment to see or hear these resources.

The Ethiopian Studies section consists of the main reading room and a vault room. There are many priceless and out of print materials in this invaluable collection. The main room has built in glass bookcases around the walls of the room. A collection of maps and oversized books can also be found. The Swedish government donated a large vault to store the manuscript collection at the NLE. Many Bibles and religious works can be found in this room. This area at the time was headed by Acting Head, Ato Hailemichael Nana.

Finally, Ato Indrias was in charge of the Reference and Documentation collection. The three rooms are too small to be very functional. The main room has a reserve readings section and built in bookcases around the room where the bulk of the circulating collection is housed. Study carrels take up every bit of space in the main room. Many high school and college students can be found studying in these areas. Due to the large number of bodies in such a small space, lack of air circulation and inadequate lighting, there is an austere feeling about the place. There is a small Amhara section with mostly literature titles and some very old United Nations publications. The other room has Reference and Africana materials. There is a critical need for space for users and materials alike. Many of the books I examined were 50-60 years old.

One of the key players of my project was Minister Woldemichael Chemu. I had met him on my first day of work and from that time he took an active interest in my project and provided much assistance and support. The Minister gave me a convenient and comfortable office and wanted to know details of my work including the work of the task force.

To accomplish objectives of the project, the first 4-6 weeks were spent talking to all levels of library staff to find out about their education, library training, and work experience. I then examined and observed library procedures and practices in the different departments. I also wished to see other libraries in Ethiopia to find if library practices differed and to see how they dealt with commonalities of insufficient space and resources. The Science and Technology Library, Addis Ababa University Library and branch libraries, British Council Library, Black Lion High School Library, the Municipal City Library, and the Commercial Library were some of those that I had the opportunity to visit.

I took a trip to the north to visit some regional libraries. Aksum had a new facility but due to the lack of funds had no cards for their card catalog. One of the castles in Gondar housed their regional library. Even though the exterior was an unusual building, the interior showed a lack of good lighting due to the expense of lightbulbs. The Gondar library lacked subject cards in that card catalog. The third library and the one with the best card catalog was in Bahir Dar. The librarian was resourceful in that he borrowed a typewriter from a neighboring agency in order to produce a library card catalog. This library was also dark and was very small for the number of books and materials it housed. Each library seemed to do the best they could to accommodate the large number of users and the few books it contained.

A series of talks and discussions on library issues, practices and procedures took place in the NLE during the second half of the project. Topics included types of libraries, the Library of Congress, preservation, interlibrary loan, intellectual freedom, and public services. These were open to both professionals and support staff of the NLE.

A task force was formed to identify main NLE issues and to make recommendations. Librarians Ato Hailemichael Nana, Ato Tilahun Awgichew, Waizerit Aster Seyum, Ato Akalu Woldemariam- Archivist- representing the National Archives, and myself were on this task force chaired by Waizero Misraketchay Debebe. We began working on a mission statement, revising a 21 old library guidebook and began work on completing the NLE's card catalog in hopes of eventually being able to proceed work on a National Catalog.

According to the NLE staff, they had never worked with an outside consultant for such a long time period. At the beginning the staff was hesitant or perhaps uncomfortable speaking with me because I was an outsider. Waizero Hirut did indeed warn me about this being one of the cultural problems of a foreigner working in Ethiopia. Language may have been a factor although I was told prior to my arrival that I would have a translator assigned to work with me. When I arrived in Ethiopia, Waizero Hirut said I didn't need a translator. Since the professional staff spoke English fairly well, this was not a big problem. However, two staff members on the task force did ask to speak in Amharic during our meetings which I agreed to so long as I could have a translation. Also, I told that not all NLE staff could attend the library discussions due to the use of English language at the sessions.

On several occasions I was told that the staff was very busy and had no time to work with me. Due to that and the fact that only a few people knew I was coming to work with the NLE in the first place made slow progress the first few months I was there. Fortunately, things began to move on after that.

Considering the situation at the NLE I felt that some contribution was made to the organization.

I believe that they felt hopeful when ALA and USIA showed an interest in Ethiopia's National Library. They look forward to a continuing relationship with me in hopes of

upgrading their Library. Due to war, previous political situations, neglect and lack of resources, the NLE has suffered greatly and deserves a chance to catch up with other libraries in the world. Obviously, the NLE is mostly looking for funding and especially in hopes that a new building will be constructed on the Ministry's compound. We started some talks on that topic and I hope to correspond with the NLE about making this new building project more feasible.

The National Archives is part of the NALE and shares work and office space with the National Library staff. The National Archives has many papers and documents due to the nature of their work. They continue to grow rapidly along with the National Library's collection and so there is an immediate need for more storage, work space, public use areas and offices. Throughout all of the NALE offices, staff are cramped and share what little space is available.

Perhaps the National Archives can work with the National Library to combine their efforts for a larger facility in the near future.

Following is a list of recommendations to the NLE. By no way is it a final list but perhaps the NLE can study some of these suggestions and improve upon them. 1- I fully recommend and support that a new library facility for the NLE to be constructed on the present compound. Existing blueprints will make it easier to modify plans if needed to get going on this much needed new building project. As mentioned previously, there is an enormous need for the receipt of books published in the 1990s, subscriptions to basic journals, a new reference collection, more bookcases and shelving as well as computers and other electronics.

2- Existing library procedures can be streamlined to make the organization run more efficiently. Some processing change can be done immediately such as having one cataloging unit instead of multiple units working for the separate teams. The NLE has talked about this much earlier and they should go ahead and implement this change that will result in consistent catalog cards.

Currently, reshelving of books is done on Monday mornings and the NLE is closed to the public. Perhaps some shelving on a daily basis can be accomplished while at the same time the Library can be open to the public on Monday mornings.

3- The NLE's card catalog is incomplete and should be finished as quickly as possible. At other times there are author and title cards, but subjects cards for a book will be missing. Any library, whether small or large needs to have an up to date and complete catalog for both users and librarians in order to access materials in the collection. In the future if the Library's catalog is computerized, a completed catalog will be useful to all. A goal of the NLE staff is to have a national union catalog listing the holdings of the bigger libraries of Ethiopia. Many countries possess such union catalogs and they are highly beneficial tools to scholars and researchers worldwide. Again, the NLE *has* to have a complete card catalog as the first step towards the goal of a national union catalog.

4- It would be helpful to the management of the NLE if the support staff had cross training to become familiar with tasks of similar jobs. In other words, a secretary could also be later trained in a library clerk's duties. This would be helpful during a time of a shortage of staff as well as to make a job more interesting by having some varied duties.

5- Physical improvements include good air circulation, adequate lighting, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, sufficient tables and chairs, improved locks and an overall good security system.

6- The NLE needs to be encouraged to forge relationships with other libraries in Ethiopia and in Africa. There is much that other regional libraries can offer to the NLE. The British Council Library offers in service training and the Science and Technology Library has offered to help with automating the NLE when it is feasible. Addis Ababa University Libraries will soon begin to automate their collection and the NLE can benefit from this process.

If possible, I would be glad to discuss any of these recommendations if there are questions regarding their implementation. The priority at the NLE is for space, as some of the newer acquisitions are not going out to the Library's shelves due to lack of shelving. At times the new books are double stacked on the shelves.

After three months, I also started two smaller library projects in Addis Ababa. Weekly I worked with Ato Simon Teklehaimanot of the Reference Department at the Kennedy Library at Addis Ababa University. I worked at the inquiry desk, did some editing of manuals, gave lectures to the library and information science students on the subject of reference, and had meetings and discussions with his staff. I also met with Ato Mulunu, Manager of the National Museum as they wanted to develop their small collection into a viable library. I trained Waizero Ehetayehu on a weekly basis and then introduced her to the Kennedy Library staff if she needed more professional instruction. We mostly discussed marking, cataloging, and making library books and journals accessible to the users.

I was invited to give a talk to the librarians of Addis Ababa University in April. My topic was entitled "Public Services in U.S. Academic Libraries". It appeared that there was interest in this subject and was well received by the public service librarians especially.

#### Experience in Another Country:

The NLE was supposed to provide me with housing but could not. Fortunately, it worked out that I could rent an embassy apartment in Arat Kilo which was in a central part of the city. My spacious apartment had the comforts of a Western country including a water distillery and a washer. The street I lived on had many shops of all kinds, a part of the university campus, a hub for local transport, St. Mary's Ethiopian Orthodox Church, a post office, Menelik High School across the street, and was about 2 kilometers from the main campus of Addis Ababa University and about six kilometers from the U.S.

embassy. Two Americans lived on my street and friendships with them helped make my stay more comfortable.

It was a very congested neighborhood in the daytime with lots of sidewalk vendors hawking their wares, university and high school students, women transporting firewood from the forests to the marketplace, men and boys herding goats and sheep, donkeys moving goods from one location to another, church goers and an active church public address system, beggars, children playing around, and taxis, personal cars and very crowded buses going about the streets.

At about 8 pm the noise greatly subsided as public transport stopped and shops closed. Many individuals did walk along the dimly lit streets and at this time streams of dogs could be seen in this part of the city. Dogs barking and howling could be heard at all times of the night in Arat Kilo.

The first few months I had an adequate water supply but then water shortages found throughout the city hit my apartment building as well. It forced me to begin accumulating and storing water for drinking and washing purposes. Small electric brownouts were common during the first two months and the last two months. A six week strike by shopkeepers in many parts of Addis Ababa made it a bit difficult to find food and others in the area.

One of the joyous festivals to the Ethiopian people is the two day religious festival called *Timkat* which I attended on different days. It commemorates the feast of St. John and it takes place in mid-January in the outdoor Jan Mada area. Thousands of people crowd the field to watch groups of brilliantly costumed deacons and priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church with their beautiful processional and hand crosses and censers, choirs of young people, musical instruments, dancing circles, and vendors selling food and religious artifacts.

The food of Ethiopia was a real treat for me. The bread called *injera* is often made from the teff grain and looks like a huge thick pancake. It is eaten with a variety of stews or *wats* that may be made from chicken, beef, lamb, goat, fish, or vegetables. The *wats* are usually spicy and hot but there are many mild or *alecha* types as well. In addition to mineral spring water-*Ambo*, there is quite a diverse mix of drinks available. There are the usual soft drinks, and good beer and wine are brewed locally. A home brew called *tella* made mostly from barley is found throughout the country and is often used for special occasions. *Tej* is a honey wine, a kind of mead which is also made in private homes and I found it extremely strong. Local people also like eating raw meat which is often dipped in ground spices or in a sauce.

Ethiopia is said to be the origin of coffee from the Kaffa province. Small cups of dark, rich, sweet coffee are drunk throughout the day. In fact, a coffee ceremony is performed by a woman of the family where the coffee beans are washed, roasted, ground, and brewed. Participants usually drink three rounds of *bunna* or coffee. Tea, soft drinks, and water may be sipped before the coffee is ready. Popcorn is always served as well.

Another hot drink, tea is also grown mostly in the southern part of the country. It is made with cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, and sugar and is served in small cups.

Another interesting aspect of Ethiopian culture is the chewing of *chat* leaves. First, cups of coffee, tea, soft drinks and water are sipped over much conversation. Then popcorn and peanuts are served. Finally, the *chat* leaves are produced and examined. The drier leaves are shaken off and the tender leaves are nibbled. *Chat* is basically a stimulant and is like drinking multiple cups of coffee. Students often chew this prior to an exam so that they can stay up and study long hours.

I made some trips by air outside of Addis Ababa to explore other parts of the country and to also see some regional libraries. The north has many historic places including Aksum with many obelisks and where the ark of the covenant is thought to be housed. The town of Gondar was an old capital of Ethiopia and it is famous for its Portuguese influenced castles and fortifications. *Tis Abay* is the Blue Nile Waterfalls which originates from Lake Tana on the shore of the city of Bahir Dar. Lalibela town has eleven rock hewn churches which are quite an awesome sight. Priests and monks come from all over the country to make a pilgrimage to this town built by the king who was also Saint Lalibela.

The Wildlife Society of Ethiopia provided many opportunities for day hikes and for some overnight trips by bus. The trip to Moyale on the southern border was extremely fascinating. The landscape, people, and people changed as we kept going south. It became much warmer as we dropped in altitude. I also visited the lovely government resorts of Lake Langano and Wendu Gennet on two occasions and briefly spent time by Lake Awassa and Lake Ziway en route to the resorts.

It was an unusual and interesting experience for me to live and work in another part of the world.

I learned to make do with what little things I had brought from the U.S. and some household items I bought in Ethiopia. I did study Amharic language much of the time I was there and learned some simple vocabulary and sentences. I also had the luxury of having a maid working half a day Monday through Friday. She did much cleaning, some marketing, and a little cooking. The NLE did provide daily transportation for me which turned out to be a very convenient service.

At first, life at the National Library and in Ethiopia moved more slowly than what I was used to but in later months became accustomed to it. Ethiopia has a different calendar and it was 1989 when I was there. Their clocks are also different with the day beginning at our western time of 7 am. These were smaller adjustments to get used to in Ethiopia. The people I worked with were extremely polite and friendly to me. Many of the professional staff invited me to coffee or tea which I greatly enjoyed.

A few times I was fortunate to be invited by Ethiopians for a meal at their house or out to a local restaurant to sample the national cuisine. This was a good opportunity to not only talk about the food but to also discuss Ethiopian culture with natives.



Many of the professionals that I had the chance to work with at the NALE were pleasant and quite helpful to me. All of the people mentioned previously and others should be commended for performing distinctive work or dealing with ongoing projects. This list includes Minister Wolde Michael Chemu, Ato Ahmed, Waizero Almaz, Ato Tillahun, Waizerit Aster, Ato Haile Michael, Waizero Misrake, Ato Akalu, Waizero Desta, Waizero Masalet, Ato Berhanie, Ato Beshir, and many others. Waizero Hirut was of great assistance until the time she resigned from the NALE.

The Fellowship: I hope the Library Fellowship I served to Ethiopia enhanced the NLE with the discussions in collection development, management, reader services and other areas. At the end of my program many librarians came to me and asked me to stay in touch with the organization and to look for information to send them on twentieth century library practices. Obviously, they saw me as a resource that they would like to acquire as much information as much as they can.

I gained an experience with another library and another culture which I would like to share with

others in and out of the library profession. I wish everyone had the opportunity that I had to live and work abroad to see that the goals, problems, and achievements we face at home are similar to what we have overseas.

Living and working in Ethiopia was not that different from what I expected it to be perhaps because of my travel and study in other cultures. Since I had never been to the African continent, I wasn't that sure of what to expect ahead of time. Even though the NLE lacked resources and technology, the staff of the NALE were helpful and provided some assistance for me.

There were two library professionals who were a tremendous asset to me. Louella Davis is the USIS librarian in Nairobi, Kenya who has visited and worked with libraries in Ethiopia. Her accounts and reports of various Ethiopian libraries were useful and provided much background information. Louella Davis did visit Ethiopia during my project and that included a discussion with the Minister of Information and Culture-Ato Woldemichael Chemu. The other librarian I met was Rita Pankhurst who has mostly lived in Ethiopia the past 30 or so years. Some decades ago she had worked at the NLE for some time. Rita Pankhurst was invited to a meeting with Waizero Almaz, Ato Ahmed, Ato Akalu and myself to talk about the present and future of the NALE.

She indicated she would be willing to assist in any way possible to improve conditions. I hope the talks will be ongoing.

In Addis Ababa, prior contacts with USIS and the NLE turned out to be very beneficial. I would also like to thank Dr. Arlene Jacquette, the PAO and Mr. Mark Wenig, the CAO, and Waizero Alme Tsehai Asfaw, the Cultural Specialist of USIS. Mr. Wenig introduced me to the NLE administrators on my initial visit to the organization and kept an ongoing

interest in my project. In addition, he also helped me with my embassy apartment rental and resolved housing and other issues that came up during my six month project.

Since my return to the US, I have been in touch with Minister Wolde Michael Chemu and the administrators of the NLE. I have also received a letter of acknowledgement from the NLE and the Kennedy Library for my service as a Library Fellow.

I do have plans to have a follow-up visit with the NLE in the future. There is much immediate and long term work to be done for a library with such a big mission in order to facilitate meeting its goals and objectives. I hope that the management and staff will continue to be in touch with me by reporting on the state of the NLE. It will be easy for me to gather research articles of interest and mail them to Ethiopia during this time and look forward to such correspondence in between onsite visits to the NLE. Both the Kennedy Library at AAU and the National Museum expressed an interest in having me do some follow up work in the near future as well.

In the United States, I wish to thank the following individuals for their support. Director Sarah Michalak, Juli Hinz- Assistant Director of Public Services, and Mary Reddick- Acting Head of General Reference, my colleagues and friends from the General Reference Department-all at the Marriott Library at the University of Utah. At ALA in Chicago, this includes April Brinkmeyer and Carol Erickson from the International Relations Office. In Ethiopia, I would like express my gratitude to the librarians in the regions of Bahir Dar, Aksum, and Gonder. The professionals at the Kennedy Library were very helpful and wonderful to meet. I wish to thank the Minister of Information and Culture, and all the librarians, archivists, and other staff members I met and worked with at the National Archives and Library. Many spent extra time doing some work for our Task Force in addition to their other duties. I would also like to thank my Fulbright acquaintances for their interest and support during my stay in Ethiopia.

Best wishes to the National Library of Ethiopia in future developments. If there is any way I could make other contributions to the organization, I would be more than happy to do that. I enjoyed my Library Fellowship as I have seen and learned a great deal and give credit to ALA

for offering such Fellowships annually. Meeting and talking with librarians and seeing libraries in Ethiopia was an enlightening experience for me. In spite of upcoming budget cuts, I hope that somehow the Fellowships will continue and that ALA will also support follow up visits.